

**Trinity Baptist Church**  
**Sunday 19th July 2020 - Andy Banks**  
**10. Jesus' Victory Over Ignorance**  
**Luke 24:44-49; Acts 17:22-31**

Good morning. This is the last in our series exploring the benefits of Jesus' resurrection for us today, as we look at his victory over ignorance. I want to begin with two readings. The first is from Luke 24:44-48, after Jesus proved to his apostles that he was truly risen from the dead, during the evening of Easter Sunday:

**Luke 24:44-48**

*44He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."*

*45Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. 46He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48You are witnesses of these things.*

And the second reading is from Acts 17:22-34, where we join Paul as he waits for his friends to join him in Athens.

**Acts 17:22-34**

*22Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. 23For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship – and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.*

*24"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. 25And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. 26From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. 27God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 28'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'*

*29"Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone – an image made by human design and skill. 30In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. 31For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."*

*32When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." 33At that, Paul left the Council. 34Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed.*

**[Pray]**

I've been reading a book of classic clangers to my children, which includes the following, published in a letter to the Poole Daily Echo: "Water levels are low. Why not fill up the reservoirs from the mains?"

There are different types of ignorance (using my own labels). Firstly, there is “*Intellectual Ignorance*,” where our brains are not sufficiently conditioned to understand a truth or argument. For example, I am intellectually ignorant of advanced metaphysics – it is beyond my reasoning capacity. Secondly, there is “*Innocent Ignorance*” of truths we simply have never heard – until last week I was innocently ignorant of the fact that the rock star, Bono, took his name from a hearing aid shop. Thirdly, there is “*Inexperienced Ignorance*.” This is where we might on one level believe a truth, but it is so far outside our life-experience that we still struggle to take it in. I find this with the concept of eternity or the truth that the universe has no end. My brain is so trained in the constraints of time and space that something without boundary is hard for me to imagine. And lastly, there is “*Intentional Ignorance*” – the *refusal* to believe a truth regardless of the evidence in support of it, or the refusal to investigate the truth or otherwise of something for fear of it being proved true.

So how does Jesus’ resurrection impact upon these four different types of ignorance?

#### 1) Intellectual Ignorance

I put Intellectual Ignorance first, because it simply is not an issue. Though intellectuals can overcomplicate it, even a small child can understand the essentials of the Christian gospel sufficiently to be reconciled to God through faith in Jesus. As Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children” (Matt 11:25). So, Intellectual ignorance is irrelevant to our discussion.

#### 2) Innocent ignorance

But, what about Innocent Ignorance? It appears that the Athenians in Acts 17 were innocently ignorant of the things of God, having never been taught the Old Testament Scriptures. So why does Paul insist that they must *repent* of their *ignorance*, in the light of Jesus’ resurrection? Isn’t it unfair of God to require repentance from people who didn’t even know that they had done something wrong? That charge is often levelled at Christians when we claim Jesus as the only way to God. “What about people who have never heard of him?” Actually, the Bible does suggest that people will be judged on what they *could* know, not on what they *couldn’t* know, and if you want to know more about that, then feel free to contact me – my details are on our website.

But were the Athenians truly innocently ignorant? In Rom 1:20 Paul asserts: “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been *clearly* seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are *without excuse*.” Just by looking at creation, *everyone* can know *something* about God. And there was also a Jewish synagogue in Athens from whom they could have learnt more if they’d wished (Acts 17:17).

But instead Paul quotes two of their own philosophers who, with the same limited opportunities, had a better grasp of the truths of God: Epimenides, who stated, “For in him we live and move and have our being”; and Aratus, who recognised that “We are his offspring.” Both were referring to Zeus, who in Greek mythology was the supreme god over all gods, and both were trying to articulate that this supreme god was far greater than man-made idols. Although couched in the terms of what they could know, they grasped something of the truth of the true supreme God who made the universe. So, from just their writings, the Athenians should have known better. Of course, Jesus’ resurrection – of which they had probably also heard *something* – offered far greater reason to repent and change their beliefs. And some did, because his resurrection overcame their ignorance.

#### 3) Inexperienced ignorance

The same is true of the inexperienced ignorance of Jesus' disciples. *They* had at their disposal the Jewish Scriptures, which included, passages like Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 – clear descriptions of God's Suffering Servant – as well as at least the embryo of the resurrection and eternal life of God's promised Messiah. Furthermore, *Jesus* had plainly told them what was going to happen to him. Mark 8:31-32: "He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke *plainly* about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him." And when Jesus told them again in Mark 9, it says (v.32): "they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it."

The disciples were not innocently ignorant, because they had clearly been told what would happen to Jesus; but they couldn't take in what they were told because it was too far outside their life-experience to understand it. It was only after they had personally *experienced* Jesus' resurrection, that their worldviews were changed sufficiently for them to be able to grasp what the Scriptures and Jesus had said all along. So, their ignorance is overcome by Jesus' resurrection. And *then* Jesus could open their minds to understand the Scriptures, as he had equally with Cleopas and his friend earlier that same day.

#### 4) Intentional ignorance

So, Intellectual Ignorance is irrelevant when it comes to believing the gospel of Jesus Christ, and both Innocent Ignorance (if it truly exists) and Inexperienced Ignorance can be overcome when we encounter the truth of Jesus' resurrection for ourselves. But what of Intentional Ignorance? What of those who have heard clearly explained the Christian doctrine of Jesus' resurrection and yet have chosen, wilfully, to disbelieve it?

The truth is there will always be people who take this stance. Paul encountered it wherever he preached, especially among God's own people, the Jews. But Paul himself was once intentionally ignorant of Jesus' resurrection, too – he'd certainly *heard* about it, but he refused to *believe* it, and even *persecuted* those who proclaimed it. Yet he wrote to Timothy (1 Tim 1:13): "Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in *ignorance* and unbelief." What overcame his ignorance and unbelief? Encountering the risen Lord Jesus for himself on the road to Damascus! Even intentional ignorance can be overcome by an encounter with Jesus' resurrection, if the person is then *willing* to repent of their former ignorance.

There are many such examples throughout history: C. S. Lewis described himself as "the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England," when he realised he could no longer escape the truth of the gospel. Lawyer, Val Grieve, who eventually wrote the book, "Your Verdict" examining the evidence for the resurrection, began his days as a law student in Oxford as an ardent atheist. He writes, "I must have been fairly intelligent, but I was certainly abysmally *ignorant* as to what Christianity was all about." So, when he encountered a fellow student who knew Jesus personally, he argued vociferously with him until, inexplicably, one Easter Sunday morning, he suddenly realised that Jesus rose from the dead and started talking to him.

I wouldn't put myself in that company, but I too was transformed by this resurrection truth. I consciously rejected Christianity as a child, but while away with the school jazz band in year 11, I felt a great disease at being unable to mark Jesus' resurrection by going to church that Easter Sunday. And a year later it was an Easter Sunday meditation that finally brought me to faith in Jesus.

So, what about you? The very fact that you have heard this service means that you can no longer claim Innocent Ignorance, and there's no special intellectual prowess needed for faith in Jesus Christ. But maybe this is all new to you and you're finding it hard to take in this talk of resurrection. Let me reassure you: Jesus is patient with our Inexperienced Ignorance, as he was with his disciples. But, I want to urge you to genuinely ask Jesus to make himself known to you. And I assure you he *will*, if your desire is real.

But it is possible to hold Jesus at arms-length by continually claiming that we're still seeking, when in fact we are Intentionally Ignorant. As Paul said to the Athenians: "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he *commands* all people everywhere to *repent*. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by *raising him from the dead*." Jesus' resurrection is all the proof we need of the truth of the Christian gospel. So, will you do what Jesus commands, and repent – turn to Christ?

But that doesn't let us Christians off the hook. Like the disciples, we can still find that there are certain Christian truths that we struggle to fully believe, because our experience to date doesn't match those truths. The gifts of the Spirit are a common example; or Jesus' simple words, "ask and it will be given to you;" or the truth that if we resist the devil, he *will* flee from us; or the freedom found in forgiving a wrong done to us, however deeply we were wounded. So, ask yourself, are there still ways in which you need to repent of Inexperienced or even Intentional Ignorance? Let's pray.